

ItaliaFest



Wherever legendary Lamborghini senior test driver Valentino Balboni's itinerary takes him people are sure to follow. Well, almost everyone that is. ...

In 2002, Lamborghini Orlando sales manager Monte Patterson phoned 60 Minutes correspondent Morley Safer in an attempt to recreate a test drive he and Balboni did for a 1987 segment on Lamborghini at the production facility in Sant' Agata. Safer, apparently, wasn't in the mood to conjure up past memories. The journalist wanted nothing to do with Balboni and the 2002 Murcielago that would be at Pocono for the Le Belle Macchine d'Italia event.

"The message from the secretary was, 'Mr. Safer wants to let you know he will never ride with Balboni again,'" Patterson recalls. "I would ride 250 mph with him down a dirt road because I have that much confidence in his ability. I guess he scared Mr. Safer." Such anecdotal conversations added to the atmosphere surround-

ing the 8th annual Italiafest track event at Moroso Motorsports Park February 17. Organized by Lamborghini Owners Club founder Jim Kaminski, Italiafest celebrates all makes of Lamborghini, Ferrari, Maserati, and Alfa Romeo.

The fact Balboni was eager to offer owners and prospective buyers a chance to ride with him upwards of 170 mph in a new Gallardo around the 10-turn, 2.25-mile road course adds an intimate element to Italiafest. "This is one event that keeps growing," said Balboni, who maneuvered nearly 100 laps with passengers. "We couldn't have asked for a better track day."

Roughly 75 sports cars were gathered around the track, but there were two rare automobiles in particular that turned heads: a 1998 Lamborghini Diablo GTR and a 2005 Maserati MC12. Among the other exotics on the track were Ferrari 348/355/360 Challenge cars, a twin-turbo Lamborghini Gallardo, Ferrari 430 Spyder, Lamborghini Countach and a 1948 Nardi Formula One racer.





Italiafest has grown into such a distinguished event for many reasons, although there are two in particular that deserve to be noted. First, all drivers no matter their experience levels get the same amount of track time. And second, it is one of only two track events like it in the United States (the other one is held the last weekend in June at Pocono) puts Italiafest on the map. Inject strict safety guidelines and it is easy to see why this event garners the kind of attention it does. "There is nothing in Italy like this that a club gets together at a track," Kaminski pointed out.



Ever wonder what it's like behind the scenes at one of these events?

A small snapshot of Kaminski's pre-event shores include renting the track, ambulance, paramedics, fire truck and wrecker, purchasing an insurance policy, arranging corner workers with flags and radios, contacting a caterer and collecting fees. Then he had to get ready for a banquet that night only to wake up at 4:45 a.m. to setup a Concours event 40 miles away the following day.



When an ambassador in the industry such as Balboni makes an appearance, which he has done for three consecutive years, all the grind instantly becomes an afterthought.

"Lamborghini owners are a different breed of people," Kaminski said. "It has always been that way." ●●●